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## **What's Left? Just The Future.**

**Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift**

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### **Introduction**

Even now, it sometimes seems, there is a kind of nostalgia for the supposed days when the Left knew what was what and what it was about. We do not share that nostalgia. Indeed, in many ways we not only like but respect the Left more now that it no longer feels the need to rely on just one account of how the world is or feels that it is necessary to strive for complete unity. Take the recent protests against the war in Iraq that took place around the globe. If you were to zero in on the crowds of people making their way down the main thoroughfares of London or Washington or Paris or a host of other places, at one scale of resolution you would see that the crowds gave out the appearance of unity but then at smaller scales of resolution you would see that they were made up of all kinds of groups of protestors, each with their own reasons for being there. Sometimes these reasons may have come from a grand analysis of American imperialism but more often they were the result of a host of different motivations including violated religious ideals or even just a vague sense of something not quite right.

We see the Left in geography in a similar light. It is multiple right from the start. It is the heir to many things. It is made up of many things. It is about many things. None of this means that it cannot work as a together; but coming together - around concepts, percepts or affects - is not some natural state. It is an achievement, an achievement which has to be worked at and which constantly changes shape. In other words, what we think the Left is about is a politics, an unending, always-changing politics. And there is no anchor.

Given this stance, you will not be surprised to find that this paper argues that the Left in geography is, so far as we can tell (and only history can really have a stab at that kind of judgement), in a pretty healthy state. Yes, it disagrees on lots of things - including what it is to be Left. So what? Just what else might we expect? Yes, there are some diehard Marxists, most notably in the US, who want to give Left geography marks for revolutionary content: presumably 7/10 in the 1960s and 1970s but only 4/10 now. How absurd. We see no crisis in Left geography. What we see instead is the continuing ebb and flow of events interacting with a certain notion of politics to produce new formations which both intervene in the world and allow new thinking to take place. We'd quite like to know what else there is - and why this isn't enough.

In this paper, we therefore map a pluralist and forward-looking position whose guiding principle is the promotion of emergence through the process of disagreement. Let's be clear right from the start about what this means in terms of a Left normativity. We do not think that this has to mean dropping all values and throwing away every advance of the past. Like many others, we believe that there are certain values that the Left has consistently held over a long period of time, none of which we would dissent from. First, a powerful sense of engagement with politics and the

political. Second, and following on, a consistent belief that there must be better ways of doing things than are currently found in the world. Third, a necessary orientation to a critique of power and exploitation that both blight people's current lives and stop better ways of doing things from coming into existence. Fourth, a constant and unremitting critical reflexivity towards our own practices: no one is allowed to claim that they have the one and only answer or the one and only privileged vantage point. Indeed, to make such a claim is to become a part of the problem.

In the recent past, the tradition of Left thinking and practice that most seemed to typify the above four values was Marxism (already, it should be added, in its many forms). However, it is difficult to see how this position can be maintained any longer, not only because new approaches have been added to the repertoire of the Left, but also because a series of re-workings of the world have taken place; re-workings that require new political strategies and new political imaginations. What was radical politics in one time is not necessarily radical politics in another: both the meanings of 'radical' and 'politics' have changed.

One reaction to this state of affairs, admittedly a more and more muted one, has been to argue that adding different critical 'isms' to Marxism will suffice, but this is not what we have in mind. It is not an uncritical infilling of an unchanged unitary project that the Left needs now, but something much more far reaching. There is no reason to believe that the Left needs to agree on everything - just think of the virulence of debates in the 1920s and 1930s over topics as diverse as class or imperialism - and every reason to believe that the strength of the Left will arise from learning from disagreement (as it too often did not in the 1920s and 1930s). In other words, our disagreements can provide the basis for connection. To make such a claim is not to espouse weakness or political quietism. Rather, it is to suggest that political agonism can have value in its own right, both tactically and normatively, and to assert that it is possible to think of a world in which we can live with and beside each other but not as one.

Such a stance does not in any way entail - as is so often claimed by its critics on the Left - an abandonment of long-held normative values such as equality, social justice, ecological responsibility, mutuality, and so on. What it does entail, however, is a sometimes painful realisation of how broad these values need to be if they are to build a together without neutralizing difference. For us, the alternative is to hold to an approach which debars certain sensings of the world (and consequent recognitions and namings) and is therefore always in danger of not being able to see beyond its own backyard, an approach which we would take to be not only tactically but also ethically problematic precisely because it bleeds out difference from the world.

And, of course, the nature of the world beyond the backyard has changed dramatically. Not as dramatically as some would argue, we are sure. We do not believe, as some commentators do, that we have transited to an entirely new political situation in which the working class has been replaced by a multitude, simplicity has been replaced by complexity, and so on. But it is to claim that business as usual is not an option. So, for example, it makes no sense to simply produce a list of old problems and a list of old methods as the privileged terrain of the Left. Equally, it makes no sense to assume that because one has produced a list of the ills of the world and declared them to be generally a bad thing, one is somehow automatically of the Left.

It is clear that economic, social and cultural conditions and definitions are constantly changing and that, equally, what is valued as politics and the political has no stable form. For example, we cannot even be sure where prevalent models of democracy arose from. In other words, the Left needs to learn to live with a degree of uncertainty which is more than just the tempering of particular principles by particular situations.

In this essay, we will enlarge on some of these issues by calling up three main lines of argument. In the first part of the essay, we will consider the question of theory. And it is a question. Theory is about building better questions which can reveal aspects of the world that have hitherto been neglected or unimagined. Then, in the second part of the essay, we turn to how practices of power have changed their character, mutating as new technologies become available and countervailing forces dream up new strategies of resistance and dissent. The third part of the essay then considers the new fields of conflict that have opened up as a result and the different kinds of political action and notions of the political that they foretell. The essay's conclusions consist of a brief geographical envoi in which we argue that Left geography is at a vital turning point after a time in which it has often led innovation in the discipline. Perhaps it could return to some kind of originary purity, thereby claiming the mantle of Left canonical faith from the rest of the social sciences (which seem to have moved on). Or, it can persist in setting the pace in the discipline as well as continuing to contribute to Left theory and practice beyond, which will undoubtedly mean more theory, more invention, more ambiguity, more experimentation - and more disagreement.

## **Working Theory**

Let us start, then, with theory. One way of looking at the current situation is to see the proliferation of theoretical approaches as deeply threatening to core Left-wing theory, notably Marxism of one kind or another. But that is not the way we see it. For us this proliferation is an imaginative resource which can only strengthen our hold on how power is exercised and how discipline disciplines. Wonderful work has been done on a whole range of topics, and through a whole range of conceptual positions, which seems to us to be fundamental in understanding what an equal and just society might consist of. And this work is not incidental – it is not a kind of footnote to the main project - rather it is the Left's way of both changing its situation in response to new events, institutions and capacities and imagining new trajectories which can assert verities that might otherwise be lost. In other words, the world always consists of necessarily incomplete thinking and bold yet hesitant practice, and theory, though it is often couched in abstract terms, is not necessarily far from the ground.

In line with this imperative, theory has taken on a different style which has a lighter touch than of old. For a start, few now believe that one theory can cover the world (or save the world, for that matter). No particular theoretical approach, even in combination with others, can be used to gain a total grip on what's going on. Theory-making is a hybrid assemblage of testable propositions and probable explanations derived from sensings of the world, the world's persistent ways of talking back, and the effort of abstraction (a word whose meaning is itself contested). And as such an assemblage, it is always incomplete, always on the mend, and always shot through with inconsistencies. It is a perpetual effort, not a finished template. This does not make theory second best, as if it were merely evocative of the demonstrations that

underlie it. Rather, it provides important capabilities (many of them negative) which can help to gain a purchase on what's happening.

Moving on, theory is more likely to be concerned with the desperate pressure for happening – what comes next and next and next - which is neither history nor culture and with the kind of self-substantiating 'agency' that results, which is compelled by all manner of auto-reactive influences and by its own demonstrations. Then, theory is more determinedly realist because it understands that so much of interaction imitates interaction itself in its own articulation. In other words, there is a dimension of objective reality that is too much its own thing ever to be framed as a mere construction and which can never be understood through the afterlife of mere reflexivity. That dimension is starting to be explored seriously, through an emphasis on the lateralities of embodiment and affect, the vitalities of what might be called expersonation, the growing technical envelope of being, and the sheer thisness of objects. And, finally, the idea of explaining the social by means of the social seems an increasingly bizarre reversion to a Durkheimian agenda in which social facts can be treated as things, rather than that all things can be treated as society. In turn, taking society as the cause causes us to miss all kinds of things that are important. Take gender. Decades of feminist scholarship have come to understand that there is a wanting part of sexuality that has nothing to do with its social or biological definition, the part that is never socialized and so energizes sociality instead.

Given this brief preamble, it is no surprise that we do not propose to list the various strands of new theory that have fed the Left's testing of living in recent years; theory that challenges Euro-centrism, anthropomorphism, hetero-normativity, and speciesism. Rather, we want to note down just some of the foci of debate which have evolved, concerning the articulation of new practices and new imaginations, foci which have necessarily produced major theoretical effort.

Let us start with one of the most pressing of these foci, namely Euro-ethnocentrism. A protracted and often painful effort has been made to give a constitutive place to other cultures and social groups, the results of which are still being worked through. But one result is clear: it is that it is no longer acceptable to think the world from the West and its underlying Whiteness. But more than this, this effort has involved a wholesale reperception of the world's history and geography - and its modes of thinking itself - as an interlocking set of interactions, rather than a bounded set of territories, an insight which holds all the way from identity politics to the politics of imperialism.

A similar kind of point can be made about the push to rethink what is in the world, often under the guise of debates about materiality and/or ontology (or, more accurately, given our position, ontogenesis). Here, it has become clear that a whole series of entities that have hitherto been neglected are centrally involved in powering up the world and themselves may have a kind of spectral political presence, not just as witnesses to or disturbances of our endeavours but as mindful contagions producing their own articulations of sense and authority and brokenness and, indeed, essence. We think here, for example, of work on animals, on material culture, on new kinds of informational landscape working through screens and code, and so on. The central point is that repairing this neglect has been an enormous theoretical challenge which, just like Euro-ethnocentrism, does not involve simply filling in gaps, but inevitably

leads to new ways of thinking about thinking the world (as, for example, in an expanded notion of what constitutes sexuality or generosity or compassion). So, for example, there is a real political challenge in imagining our way into co-existing with other worldly responses and imperatives, such as those which might arise from particular ecosystems and particular informational ecologies, which demonstrates that the question is not so much whether something called the 'environment' will survive its various peoplings as whether these peoples will survive their own environing.

Moving on again, what both these literatures have demonstrated is that what were considered to be stable moral and ethical positions have to be rethought. It is simply not possible, for example, to attribute 'agency' to other kinds of actor and retain a stay-at-home ethics. An expanded ethics is required. And this is not a trivial point in a world in which violence is rife and forms of inhumanity seem to be multiplying, perhaps in part precisely because of fundamentalist moral templates which the Left itself may sometimes be closer to than it might wish to believe. After all, at various points in history, a certain Utopian impulse in Left thinking can be and has been too easily converted into an authoritarian reality. At the very least, given this record, one would think that a less impositional and anti-humanist stance might be thought to be necessary, one which recognises that people constitute part of a green slime covering one insignificant planet - and yet does not lie down in the face of this fact.

All of these challenges can be related to the analysis of capitalism, often thought to be the bread and butter of what's Left. What seems clear is that capitalist social relations have certainly been bent and in some cases changed in very dramatic ways by a continual process of historical change, much of which is inevitably unpredictable - by clashes with highly differentiated labour organisations and consumer organisations, by new articulations with non-capitalist social formations, and by institutions of reflexivity which inform capitalist business practice. Our belief is that the internal dynamics of capitalism are increasingly likely to be interrupted by forces like these and by growing complexity, such that it becomes increasingly difficult to read off determinate outcomes. This is not to say that capitalism does not exist or that it does not have a core dynamic, but that the diversity of forms it takes has increased and has become more and more intertwined. Thus, we are very wary of highly structured readings of capitalism, replete with scales and driving logics. Rather like the glossy outputs from global climate change simulations, they inspire a false sense of confidence about the level and detail of knowledge about capitalism it is possible to have. We believe that injecting uncertainty into the analysis of capitalism makes good theoretical and practical sense, and moreover, is in line with one of the real powers of its objects, the ability to act rapidly and frugally in the face of disconcerting events. It seems only sense to us, therefore, to allow many quite different theories of capitalism to flourish (from institutional and evolutionary economics to more modest experiments in cultural economy as well as current obsessions with Spinozan immanence). This is because in a very real sense, they have much to say about the different problems that different parts of the Left may face, and the different questions that may be appropriate.

For Left geographers, these challenges inevitably extend into debates about the production of space and time. Whatever the shade of opinion, it is difficult to find commentators on the Left who do not believe that there has been some kind of shift in the way in which space and time appear. Furthermore, this shift is not innocent. It

has political resonance. Whether one is writing about time-space compression, the lack of ability to cognitively map, new metaphors for thinking about spatial relations (e.g. fluids, fires, distanciation, and so on), new kinds of political space (e.g. developments of the chora, public space, virtual democracy), or a simple change in the background procedures of everyday life, it seems evident that something is going on and that it can frame Left politics positively and negatively - for example, in terms of the speed of transmission of ideas and affect, in terms of the ability to associate together, in terms of the '(a)whereness' of democracy, and in terms of how the space-times of the body are being redefined. Each of these redefinitions produces new forms of power, both general and capillary, and new possibilities of government and resistance. Instead of seeing each of these developments as mutually exclusive, it seems to us it would be far more productive to see them as different kinds of continental drift, joining together and detaching according to spatio-temporal circumstance.

Which brings us to the final point we want to make in this section. What these challenges add up to are powerful new geographies of organisation, belonging and attachment, which are literally redefining the spaces of what it is to be political. We can see this in the way in which unitary state government has changed into multiple layers of governance with much increased connection between them. The result is that states have become more porous at certain scales while operating in lock-down at others. Indeed, some observers claim that international alliances between state departments (e.g. ministries of finance in the G8 or regulators of various kinds) have become more important than national states, forming a series of flexible government networks that rule different spaces and times of the world. Of course, this is not dissimilar to what has been happening within multinational corporations, where interfirm networks are often as significant as intra-firm hierarchies. We are seeing the rise of a heterarchical order which increasingly constructs its power by both producing and using diversity. In these circumstances, an imperative for the Left, first of all, is to identify the varied sites and geographies of heterarchical power and not to shy away if that journey takes us in to unfamiliar territory. A second imperative is to accept that the assault on instituted power must be selective and that a division of political labour is not a bad or contrary thing. There is nothing that adds up in a way that can be grasped through a singular politics of resistance.

A necessary corollary of this approach is that senses of political belonging and attachment are changing and that there is no one-size-fits-all adjustment to be made. In some parts of the world, persons are still mobilized around single issues and territories. But in so many others, subjects of all classes are made up of all kinds of political imperative and allegiance, each of which has to be called to in different ways. This is not some kind of collage. Rather, it is a rich warp and weft of different kinds of politics and political imperatives which are the subject of the next section.

Of course, the 'old' issues remain: industrial workers continue to die in accidents, work remains under-paid, under-regulated and noxious in many parts of the world, strikes are banned or severely curtailed, market models are inappropriately applied to some forms of collective provision, we are probably at a high water mark of organised prostitution and crime (by some counts, there are more slaves in the world than during the days of the Roman Empire), and many people around the world have no human and other social rights, whether these consist of the right not to be assaulted in their

homes or the right to walk down the street free of abuse or the right not to be falsely imprisoned. The Left rightly concerns itself with these issues, and will continue to do so. It would be self-evidently absurd to argue against such concerns.

In turn, however, it is important to understand the way in which power, exploitation and marginalisation construct new fields of influence and themselves react to new forms of counter-politics which are periodically invented. The political sphere is continually being redefined and what might count as a democratic project twenty or thirty years ago must require updating as a matter of course if we are not to commit the cardinal error of producing less worlds than we started from. It is not so much that we believe that the political is or ever could be a static object or a single trajectory. That much is surely obvious. Rather, it is that we believe that politics is multiple right from the start and therefore together must always be a temporary gathering.

### **New Sites of Power and Exploitation**

Let us start, then, with sources of power that are making their way into the world. The first of these consists of the continual redefinition of what counts as private property. That might mean new forms of recombinant industrial property as found in many parts of Eastern Europe, it might mean bio-prospecting in Mexico, or it might mean the discovery of new genomes and proteomes in San Diego. At the same time, there is a slippage in what counts as intellectual property rights (witness the struggle over free music downloads) and an on-going struggle over how long patents, licences and other property rights can be held (as in the struggle over anti retro-virals or over how long copyright over books and films can be extended). The Left must be involved in a continuous struggle to reassert the primacy of the commons, but recognising that the territory of what constitutes property has not only immeasurably changed but often involves very different kinds of material witness. This change throws into very considerable doubt the validity of the claim in Marxism that the simple abolition of private property is the big step that must be taken on the road to freedom.

Second, the form which definitions of humanity take is also constantly shifting. In some areas of the world, certain persons are systematically excluded from citizenship, sometimes on entirely new bases (e.g. gene-based re-filiation, rights based on access to basics such as water or even the radio spectrum, or simply being born in excluded zones of the world, where even the right to bare life is questioned). Increasingly, the world seems to be under the grip of a new regime in which biopower is no longer an ambition but has simply become a mundane reality and in which an apparently simple 'bare life' is increasingly filled almost to bursting with complex procedures of control. This begs a new political ambition, but it also raises the very difficult question of how the struggles of those barely recognised as humans must link with other sections of humanity for whom lack is about other things such as access to the internet or to emotional security and mutual recognition. What is clear is that what counts as the field of struggle for recognition has, at once, both expanded considerably as well as divided quite sharply, resulting in the negation of a singular politics of belonging and citizenship.

Third, the forms which power takes constantly mutate. So, for example, it is clear that power is now being generated through the ability to initiate and track and



modulate flow in ways which are both more systematic and more invasive than in the past. Whatever description is offered of this form of power – network, heterarchy, complexity, flow architecture, immanent forces, technostucture – the fact is that it allows careful placing of bodies and other objects to become a governmental art form at scales and in situations hitherto undreamt of (e.g. biometrics). Clearly all kinds of threats arise from this development, from gross surveillance through new forms of embodiment and subjectivity that are slaved to the assumptions of these manifestations of power, through to the danger that very large amounts of political thinking will be automated, through to the extreme difficulty, in some cases, of locating the pinch points of power according to the traditional means of discovery that we have become used to. Following on from this, large corporate concerns have simply become more skilled at working with international workforces and have produced a hierarchy of flows of people, which has become a constant course of profit in its own right, all the way from gathering particular kinds of scientific expertise in elite locations, to the extensive use of illegal workers organised through hands-off subcontracting networks. One might argue that these developments have been taken up most avidly by governments. Now that the division between government and the corporate sector has been broken down by the agency of business schools, consultancies, corporate lobbying, and the like, new arts of governmentality are rapidly becoming general, seducing too many forms of politics and organisation in civil society too.

Fourth, these steps towards the comprehensive capillarisation of power are affecting the nature of state power. At one level, states are conceding certain areas of traditional control to new actors, but also, because of this, working at new forms of capture and co-habitation with these new actors. So for example, it is no longer accurate to argue that states and civil or economic organisations stand in opposition to each other, for all manner of state incursion into and collaboration with these organisations has grown. At another level, there can be no doubt – as we see from the reactions to terrorism, so-called rogue states and fundamentalisms of various sorts – that Western state power, or more accurately Pax Americana, and its monopoly over the means of violence has become more entrenched through all manner of acts, including violations of international rules of state conduct, capture by the US and its cronies of inter-state diplomatic arenas, and state-driven attempts to legitimate global invasion, to re-draw what is morally acceptable in world affairs, to decide on who or what counts as civilized. The conduct and map of geo-politics has been thoroughly redrawn around a tightly centred but relatively fragile US imperialism in ways which are fiercely debated precisely because their exact form and content is not known, even to their progenitors.

Fifth, though the Left has constantly pointed to the dominating power of the media in contemporary life, still it needs underlining just how pervasive that power has become and how threatening to certain definitions of what constitutes a good life. We have become surrounded by constant reminders to consume, constant affective frames like melodrama which too cosily locate the inequities of the world, and by short-cut cultures which have become skilled at quick and dirty mobilisations, including the redefinition of citizenship and social worth to suit corporate imperatives. As importantly, the concentration of media power is going on apace (as in the loss of locally owned media outlets in the US) and is also bleeding into other forms of ownership (as in the increasing links between print media and large information

technology combines). The result is that accounts of the world come from a disturbingly few sources, whose imperative increasingly lacks much sense of the public interest and indeed acts counter to it in the sense that certain topics (e.g. local workplace politics) are not treated, whilst other topics are treated only in clichéd ways.

Sixth, runaway consumption in certain parts of the world clearly constitutes a problem of growing proportions, one which has still to find a convincing political language which chimes with people's everyday life. Shoppers and shopping, especially in North America, have acquired an implicit economic power which is at the centre of globalization. Without these shoppers, it is possible to argue, the Chinese economy would not be booming, together with many countries in South and South East Asia, the world financial system would be in difficulty (since consumer demand translates into demand for credit as well as all kinds of currency dealings and props), and many corporations would collapse. On the other hand, without these shoppers, we would also have a slower rate of resource depletion, less damaging global climate change, and much attenuated energy demands. It is clear that, underlying this dynamic, there is a set of ethical issues which are usually posed in much too grand a way for consumers to grasp. As the work of many new consumption theorists shows, the world of everyday goods is shot through with meanings and attachments, with senses of belonging and even love, which the Left is still struggling to grasp, except through moralistic disapproval whose only effect is to make the Left feel good about itself. We are not arguing for uncritical acceptance of these new forms of affiliation, but at the same time, it is patently absurd to reject the new consumerism from some Olympian height.

Seventh, though it is a hackneyed point, still it must be made again. This is a world in which difference is itself a value and differential attachments have value in their own right. It is fair to say that the Left has struggled to incorporate difference into its projects, but now realises that that is not enough. Current reworkings of Left politics have come to understand the world as a patchwork of concerns, rather than as a single project and have become open to learning from these concerns and indeed changing the nature of political imperatives, not so much to accommodate as to welcome them. This reworking is important because forces of government themselves in some countries increasingly work in this way, as we can see from recognitions of multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and the rights of distant strangers. It is possible to argue that the situation requires entirely new forms of political analysis. For example, it has been argued that US electoral democracy has become entirely dysfunctional, in that for most non-white working class citizens, political engagement now takes place aperiodically around big or small affective firestorms which all cultural groups can opine over and feel some ownership of (e.g. the OJ Simpson affair or celebrated cases of attack on asylum seekers). Such developments do not conform to standard mainstream and Left readings of political process and priority and yet they seem to us to be crucial while being unable to easily be contained within standard accounts of the politics of difference. Meanwhile, the ascendancy of Islam in large parts of the world points to the implicit Eurocentrism of too much thinking in this area, supposing, as it does, that difference can necessarily be accommodated in a liberal democratic settlement. There are, in other words, major cultural cleavages that require political languages of the irreconcilable.

We hope to have done enough to demonstrate that the sphere of the political constantly changes as new directive events and processes take hold. But there is one more point to make, which is that all these changes act as a continual interrogation of how the political itself should be framed. This is not some arid theoretical point. It lies at the heart of the ways in which the Left addresses the problems of the world. In a time when military extension of state power is more of a reality than for many years, when the romance as well as the grievance of terrorism is felt strongly by many, when direct action in opposition to globalization has forged a different kind of spatial politics, and when new political actors are routinely proliferating, it seems absurd to us to argue that all that is needed is more of the same from the Left. What we really need is more of the different, threaded together in loose coalitions which can respond as and where necessary. In the final section, we want to outline some of the new forms of political action that can help us out of some of the current political logjams.

### **Other Engagements**

In the light of the above theoretical orientations, we can think of a number of new forms of political action which herald both the deployment of different political qualities (such as affect) and arenas (such as everyday life). In each case, these forms of action are fostered by five principles which we believe that any active Left political action should cleave to. First, unlike some commentators, we do not believe in the certainty of critique or an inevitable telos. Some political actions are taken without the full benefit of analysis, programme or certainty of outcome, and yet may well have important consequences for a politics of struggle and emancipation. The principle we wish to defend is that of democratic experimentalism.

Second, we do not believe in the romance of pulling down the whole system, whether that be capitalism, the state, or some other monstrous entity. This would be to assume that such total systems exist, puts too much weight on a kind of Manicheanism and short-circuits numerous other kinds of political action which come to be regarded as secondary or ephemeral. As importantly, there is some evidence to suggest that such a politics of the total ends up as a kind of authoritarianism that mirrors the objects of its critique. The principle we wish to defend is that of a transversal politics that is constantly worked at, that accumulates new political concerns as new events unfold and that, through such accretion, builds a whole that is more than the sum of its parts - but does not sum up.

Third, we believe in the constitutive power of disagreement. We do not believe in agonistic politics for its own sake, but equally, we do not believe that it is necessary to come to agreement in order to sanction action. This would be a denial of the principle of the political itself, so far as we are concerned, as formative ground and sphere of becoming. Of course, this does not deny the importance of making attachments, forging connections, or setting up alliances. Indeed, one might argue that this is precisely the work of the political. A Left which instead chose purity, in our opinion, would no longer be doing politics, but would instead be involved in a project of what one might call authoritarian consolation.

Fourth, it follows that we believe that the world is an open political horizon. At any point, there are least worse options which can make a difference. Whether we frame this as the politics of hope, as a politics of mundane transcendence, or even as a

politics of immanence, it seems to us to be vital to hold on to an optimism about the world as perhaps the constitutive element of Left politics. This means that the Left can once and for all leave behind a certain kind of conservatism in which it is automatically against anything new on the grounds that it has been borne out of the malign forces of capitalism or that it has all been accounted for in a previous manifestation.

Fifth, it follows that we believe that political action can take place at all kinds of scales, and that there is no necessary need to make a distinction between little and large politics. In the annals of Left struggle, it is not clear to us that producing clean water for a village in Ethiopia is somehow less important than producing a world political manifesto. Acts of freedom are many, varied, and often require just as much work of alliance and political nuance at one scale as they do at another. The Left cannot afford to believe that it has privileged oversight.

In mapping out some new forms of politics, we are not intending to be exhaustive, nor are we trying to diminish the significance of enduring forms of struggle – in the workplace, in the domestic sphere, in the public arena, within all manner of communities, organizations and institutions, even over and for life itself. Rather, we want to illustrate some of the ways in which Left politics can be extended and, or at least so we would argue, strengthened. Returning to the seven theoretical orientations we have mapped out above, we can point to some of the forms of political action which are now able to become part of a Left political repertoire. Once again, we want to stress that these are borne out of the problems faced by activists and theoreticians together in thinking through particular events. They should not be seen as a part of some overarching political toolkit, but rather as the result of making new realities out of experimenting with the world in new ways.

We can begin, then, with new forms of property. Here, we can think of a whole series of political actions such as those which have been associated with asserting indigenous people's rights to knowledge and resources, forms of action which have tried to assert common ownership of copyright, and attempts to produce cheap drugs in the face of corporate super-profits. More generally, as we saw from the example of recombinant property in East Europe, we can point to experiments with hybrid ownership forms that fall short of public ownership but yield considerable social benefits (e.g. copyLeft, worker participation, stake-holder rights). Similarly, there have been interesting experiments in both North and South with cooperatives, new forms of associative economic organisation which emphasise mutuality, and a range of initiatives which attempt to harness the wealth of pension funds to wider social ends. The point about all of these developments is that, though many of them necessarily fail, gradually the Left is learning what works, and, as importantly, from a choice of existing experiments which offer varying social outcomes.

Second, we can point to the politics taking place around new forms of humanity and vitality more generally. For example, there are attempts to produce various forms of environmental justice, attempts to rebase cities so that animals and other sentient beings are included as partners in suffering and hope, attempts to produce a politics of genetic injustice against hopefully residual eugenic impulses (such as fighting insurance company redefinitions of common risk), all kinds of struggles around 'disability', and so on. As importantly, these struggles are yielding forms of

producing knowledge which are highly cooperative and fundamentally positional. For example, the production of scientific knowledge can be pushed in particular directions that work against the grain, producing conjoint knowledges of various kinds (such as the involvement of sufferers in cures for aids, or the role that patients have played in democratising the search for cures for muscular dystrophy in France) that may have powerful political resonances.

Third, there is no doubt of the need for a politics of informational liberty in the face of new forms of network power which rely on constantly mutating information to exist. Such politics range all the way from simple attempts to assert freedom of information, through more complex attempts to foresee the likely impacts of continuous tracking technologies like GPS and RFIDs. Similarly, there are all those political struggles which aim to insert interrupts into global networks of flow, so as to allow those who are being shuttled around the world to have some choice over their trajectory (e.g. work with illegal workers and asylum seekers, forms of citizenship that allow intermittent habitation and rights of mobility, attempts to formulate a basic right of movement for poorer people who are otherwise excluded from most of the social networks that others take for granted in societies where friends and kin are increasingly spread). Then, there are all the attempts to show up the mundane world of flows, and by showing it up, to produce new political possibilities, from attempts to formulate a socialised politics of software through to attempts to resist the workings of state power by tackling iconic objects (e.g. artistic mockeries of the security industry or many of the artistic attempts to work with showing the basic structure of the web). Finally, of course, there are all the travails of the anti-globalization movement, seeking to forge alliances and commons across differentiated webs of mutuality. What is interesting of late is the degree to which irony and absurdity are being added to the armoury of these protestors, for example, in attacks on management speak, audit culture, and the pompous extravagances of G8 and Davos.

Fourth, the anti-globalisation movement has come to show that an alternative geopolitics based on shifting and heterogeneous solidarities across the world, gathered around significant events such as the meetings of the World Social Forum, can have considerable political purchase. This is a politics of resistance based on small projects and loose alliances, some of which are entirely tactical. The absence of telos or coherence is not necessarily a weakness. The gains have been considerable, in outlining a possible alternative world to corporatism, in cementing a culture of transversal solidarity across the human and ecological landscape, in rattling the certitude and arrogance of the neo-liberal and US-centred elite, and in imagining new geographies of affect, obligation and commitment to distant others. Of course, there is a danger in over-romanticizing this movement, but its potential as a counter-weight to the leviathan of new state-driven global geo-political reconfigurations should not be underestimated.

Fifth, the Left has always understood the importance of the media, whether in the form of agit prop or particular design styles, at least in part because artists have been such a vital cog in the machine of dissemination of ideas and protest. It is no surprise, then, that the media constitute one of the most vibrant areas of Left politics, especially given the conjuncture between old traditions and new media. One of the most exciting developments has been the growth of various kinds of web and discussion site which have allowed all kinds of exotic political discourse to flourish, precisely at

a time of apparent closure in mainstream media. However, the real political issue is not whether the Left can talk to itself (important though that is), but whether it is possible to find forms and outlets which can talk to more general populations and in a sustained way. Here, the importance of a representational and non-representational politics of affect becomes clear. It is necessary to think through the different ways in which political content is freighted with affect and the various sensory registers in which this varied content makes its mark and holds interest. So, for example, a new performative counter-politics is appearing in an attempt to allay the fears of asylum seekers generated by the mass media.

Sixth, the politics of consumption continues to be an enormous challenge to the Left. One issue is how to frame environmental imperatives in ways which relate to people's everyday lives, as in recent attempts to politicize cleanliness. How is it possible to at once to ensure that the needs of those who have very little can be met whilst curtailing the extravagances of the well-off? These issues of frugality and redistribution have to be sieved through networks of use and practice built up over many years, networks whose rightness is very often felt in the guts. A parallel issue is the attempt to produce a politics of the geography of environment and consumption, through both practical initiatives like fair trade, farmers' markets, slow food and other forms of ethical consumption and media-savvy initiatives which attempt to reconnect everyday items like food with their origins in far away places. Another area is the politics which attempts to attack consumers' love for objects such as cars, through semiotic deconstructions which use the full force of savage irony, humour and embarrassment in order to tear the car away from consumer heartstrings. Then, there is a politics which attempts to work with the affirmative nature of many elements of consumer objects, for example, their status as gifts which trace out networks of friendship and kinship, and through these networks redefine what are acceptable exchanges, thereby hitting at the concept of value itself as it is understood in the minutiae of everyday life.

Seventh, and perhaps most developed, there is the cauldron of identity politics. The abiding lesson that the Left has learnt over the last 20 years has been its provincial character, and the need to displace that character if a global politics is ever to become possible. There are many possibilities for a non-parochial politics which can make peoples broad instead of confining them by finding spaces for opening up to the surprise of combination. We can point to three illustrative examples. One is the large number of performance-related events which mobilise particular kinds of identity, often in powerful ways, but which are also often able to act as a knowing critique of precisely this social form (e.g. the affirmations of ethnic and sexual identity that have come from street theatre). Another is the ways in which Left politics has attempted to manipulate spaces of various kind in order to show how identity is politically constructed, from the important work on border identities and border politics being carried out in places as diverse as Mexico and Indonesia, to the work on decolonisation and cultural mixture in state spaces such as Ireland, through to attempts to frame diaspora in all its varied geographies. Such work on hybrid political spaces seems to us to be exemplary in helping the Left to construct a global democratic politics that is not constrained by the forcings of class, territory and ethnicity. The last example, closely connected to the other two, is concerned with the politics of memory. Here, one can point to rich cases around the world which seek to

witness the past in novel ways, so that different emotional attachments can be forged and different hopes can be generated.

## **Conclusions**

It would be difficult to deny the difficult days that the world is going through. One might say that the four horsemen of the apocalypse have moved from a quiet trot to a full gallop and this increase in activity has been accompanied by the rise of right wing politics of various kinds which are clearly associated with a series of state and corporate ideologies and practices that must be denied any more room in the world and that, in time, must be rolled back. But, we also think that it is possible to be too pessimistic if boundaries are drawn too narrowly around what constitutes the political and Left politics.

In contrast, in this essay, we have argued for a broader understanding of what is to be struggled over assembled through a broad coalition of often conflicting political interests. We believe that a politics of working through inevitably difficult coalitions holds out the possibility of learning, precisely because that diversity can provide real and evolving strength in depth, arising out of the continual rebirth such a stance demands. In other words, we are arguing for something closer to an ecology of hope than to a political machine, an ecology of hope which is constantly adapting to circumstance as it tries to reproduce itself, an ecology that can teach ourselves to them and in so doing reach a kind of escape velocity.

## ***And Left Geography?***

And, finally, what does all this mean for Left geography? So far as we are concerned, it means moving on. Let's agree to disagree and get on to the politics. So, first of all, no more policing. Throughout our time in geography, there have been those who have wanted to police the Left, who have wanted to keep it as a kind of club, complete with rote declarations of intent and the like. We are not interested in being members of this club or in the periodic set-piece shoot-outs that are meant to keep it pure: it is our world too and we are not going to apologize for seeing it in a different way. A gate-keeper politics will only serve the critics of the Left in and beyond our discipline, and might well be regarded as irresponsible in the face of the plethora of issues currently vying for political attention.

But, secondly, in rejecting policing, we do not wish to defend an undifferentiated pluralism – a kind of free-for-all Left politics which is nothing more than an agonized liberalism. There are real differences of situation and perspective in the world which go far beyond framing forms of accusatory culture, and they matter in terms of what it is possible to say and do about the world and its ways. However, given that very important caveat, we would go so far as to argue that a clear divide is emerging within Left geography between, for want of a better word, a hierarchical, enclave Left that sees system, deep structure and normative purity everywhere it looks, and a heterarchical Left that perceives a flatter world of multiple orderings and non-linear connections that calls for constantly re-negotiated tactics. No doubt the table below, which attempts to capture some of these differences, will be hotly disputed by those on both sides of the divide as well as others who might wish to be named differently. But our purpose is not to pigeonhole. It is simply to illustrate how far we think that things have changed in Left geography.

<b>Hierarchical Left</b>		<b>Heterarchical Left</b>	
<b>Optic</b>	<b>Orientation</b>	<b>Orientation</b>	<b>Optic</b>
Capitalism as system	Purism	Systematic promiscuity	Capitalist orderings
	Structure	Instituted practices	
	Morals	Ethics	
World to be uncovered	Goal-driven	Agonistic learning	World to be made
	Being	Becoming	
	Prescription	Innovation	
Space as known	Certitude	Experiment	Space as made
	Utopian spaces	Spaces of hope	
	Scale	Space	

Thirdly, moving on in geography means amplifying the imperative to connect. It is no good drawing lines and boundaries around a world which continually overflows them and around a politics which needs to evolve in order to keep pace with that overflowing. This must mean not only imagining the world in multiple ways but also, and particularly important for a discipline which is nowhere near as interdisciplinary as it fondly thinks, a willingness to engage with heterodox thinking drawn from all manner of disciplines. If there ever was just one geographical tradition, that tradition has now exploded, and it would surely be presumptuous for the Left in geography to think that it knows it all or that what is Left elsewhere is not Left.

Finally, then, moving on must mean feeling that there is a vibrant Left project in geography which we should feel privileged to be part of, a project which forms a rich map of territories and networks of concepts, percepts and affects that constitute the main resource within which we think, from which we draw inspiration and which we all have a responsibility to nurture with new ideas and practices. The Left is a living tradition, with many ways of summoning life. It is time that the Left in geography came to accept this vibrant pluralism, instead of insisting that certain perspectives necessarily hold a privileged insight into the ways of the world. There is just too much going on in the world to need to close things down in this way, and every reason to believe that many of the prospects for better societies will come from the excitement of learning this anew.